

Bacon, Edgar Maynard

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In Memoriam

Washington Irving



Who Died November 28th, 1859

at his home, Sunnyside

Tarrytown-on-Hudson

1859

1909

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1851
In Memoriam
Washington Irving

+ WHEATONOR IRVING
born in the city of NEW YORK,

(APRIL 3 1783)

For many years
a Commissary and Member
of the Church and Officer in one
of its Delegates to the Convention of
the Divines

FOE I HONORED REVERED
He fell asleep 125v
NOVEMBER 28 1857

"Living to wing with mirth the dreary hours,
Or with romantic tales the heart to cheer,
Dying, to leave a memory, like the breath
Of summer full of sunshine and flowers."

—Longfellow, at the grave of Washington Irving



IRVING WAS ELECTED WARDEN OF CHRIST CHURCH AFTER HIS RETURN FROM HIS MISSION
AS UNITED STATES MINISTER TO SPAIN



The Gentle Humorist



IFTY years ago the man most universally esteemed by the critical few and the uncritical millions of American readers, laid down his pen.

From that day until this there have been written and printed about him and his work uncounted pages of analysis, that have neither added to nor subtracted from popular appreciation of the gentlest and most beneficent of humorists.

It requires the lapse of half a century to determine whether a writer has secured a permanent place in the temple of letters, and many surprising reversals of judgment have occurred, while very few of the authors of a generation ago measure up to the estimate of their contemporaries.

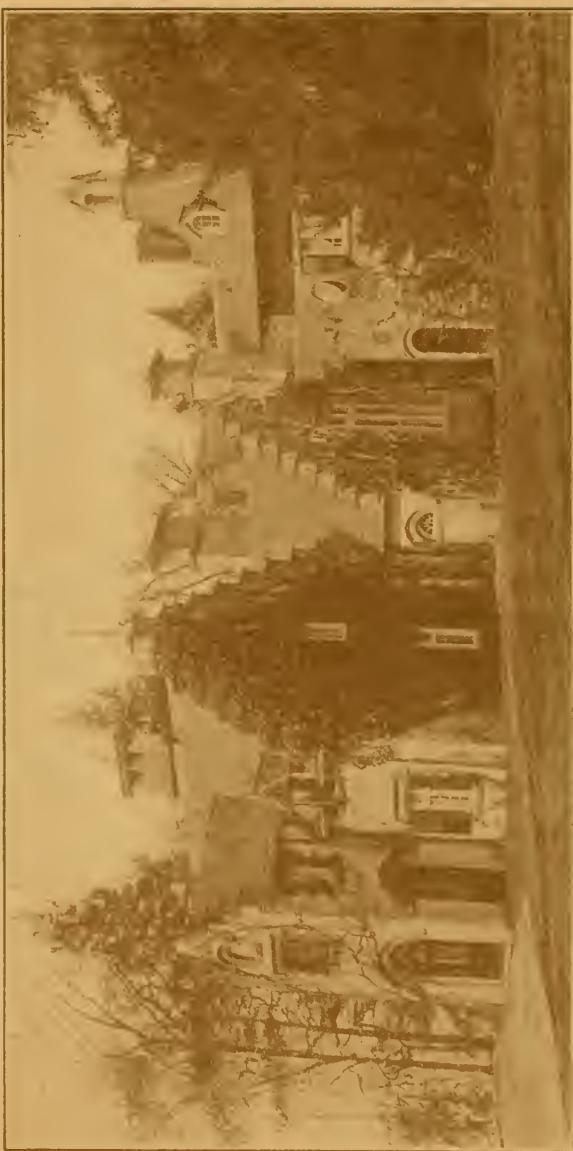
It is safe to say that Irving's fame looms larger with each decade, although that reputation does not rest most securely upon the works which he and his publishers no doubt deemed "important," but upon writings that belong to a class generally esteemed fugitive and ephemeral. It is the author of the Knickerbocker and other Dutch character sketches, even more than the biographer of Washington, Mohammed or Goldsmith, that the world still delights to honor, but the whole body of his work is pervaded by a pe-

culiarly attractive personality. One is inclined to accept Charles Dudley Warner's estimate, as thoroughly sympathetic, if not comprehensive;

"I think the calm work of Irving will stand when much of the more startling and perhaps more brilliant intellectual achievements of this age have passed away. There is something that made Scott and Irving personally loved by the millions of their readers, who had only the dimmest ideas of their personality. This was some quality perceived in what they wrote. * * * Irving's literature, walk round it and measure it by whatever critical instruments you will, is a beneficent literature."

Whence comes that "quality" which Warner discovers in Irving's work? Truly one is inclined to believe with Dogberry that "to write and read come by nature," for how else can we account for the production by an author of only twenty-six years of a humorous history of New York that has taken stronger hold of the imagination of successive generations of readers than any serious presentation of its story; that raised its author's reputation, as a master of style, to a par with that of Addison, and gave to the Metropolis its titulary deity. But for the comfort of those whose early work has not been recognized, it may be pointed out that Irving's genius matured after he had reached middle age, was indeed passing rapidly towards that mellow time of life when men living under more modern conditions are advised to retire.

The "Gentle Humorist" was past fifty years when he was finally able to follow the bent of his inclination and settle in his chosen nook beside the Tappan Zee.



SUNNYSIDE, THE HOME OF WASHINGTON IRVING

To a multitude of more or less romantic people the fashion of making pilgrimages is always an attractive one. There are highways that are little known except as paths that lead to some one or another of the world's shrines. As men went a thousand years ago with staff and "sandal shoon" to Jerusalem, so now they journey to Stratford, or Stoke Pogis, to the House of the Seven Gables, or to Sunnyside. It is a strong and defensible instinct that makes us desire to see and touch the things that were familiar to those whose impulses have moved us, and whose thoughts we have made our own.

Sunnyside and its surroundings have become to the world, as it were, the centre of Irving's Country, and truly the cottage that he elaborated from Van Tassel's little stone farmhouse was as much a work of his humorous imagination as were the tales of Rip Van Winkle, Dolph Heyliger, or even the immortal Ichabod. There was a strong suggestion of whimsical humor that pervaded the whole architectural motive of the house and culminated in a crazy weather-vane that he gravely declared was brought from Holland by Gil Davis, the King of Coney Island.

Irving made large sums—large, that is, for his day—by his literary labors, but only the most rigid personal economy rendered his income sufficient for his living expenditures, and his industry was unremitting till the very close of his life. The reason for this insufficiency of income was twofold. First, the cottage which he had planned as a mere summer retreat became an unsatiable devourer of money. It speedily outgrew all his plans, and was ultimately the permanent home not only of the bachelor author, but of a family

connection that was regimental in proportions.

With the same matter-of-fact acceptance of family responsibility that had characterized his brother's generous attitude towards himself in more youthful days, he opened his doors, as his heart was already open to "Ebenezer's five girls and himself also whenever he could be spared from town. Sister Catharine and her daughter; Mr. Davis occasionally, with casual visits from all the rest of our family connection." No wonder that he added "The cottage, therefore, is never lonely."

In 1835 he wrote to one of his brothers: "I have just returned from a visit of two or three days to Tarrytown to take a look at my cottage. . . . It has risen from the foundations since my previous visit. . . . I intend to write a legend or two about it and its vicinity by way of making it pay for itself."

The "legend or two" became world famous, and have been translated into so many languages that the dwellers by the Seine, the Rhine, the Danube or the Mediterranean are almost as familiar with "Wolfert's Roost" and the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" as are those whose good fortune it has been to live beside the Tappan Zee.

There is a delightful naive confession of commercialism in the quotation given above. Frankly the child of genius owns the motive which we must accept as the real genesis of our local scripture; but with the motive, the hint of commercialism ceases. The artist creator, with a purpose as definite and as sensible as that which animates the merchant when he cuts off a yard of ribbon, or the woodsman when he grinds his axe, opens that Pandora box which is imagination, and living

characters escape into the world of letters, never again to be caught or reconfined.

"By way of making it pay for itself," Ichabod Crane, literary descendant of Jesse Merwin of Kinderhook, was brought into being. Jesse Merwin died long ago, but Ichabod is immortal. Katrina Van Tassel was created by the same impulse, and so were Brom Bones, old Balthas, Gunpowder and the various *Dramatis Personae* of the legend.

"By way of making it pay for itself," Van Tassel fired his great goose gun at the British fleet in the Tappan Zee, and the echoes of that shot have reverberated around the world almost as noisily as did the report of the gunpowder burned at Lexington.

One listens with a smile to the efforts of this wiseacre or that one, to prove that the real scene of the Legend of Sleepy Hollow was here or there, or that the real persons were so-and-so. There is only one land of legend; only one Ar-cadie; only one Forest of Domremy: they are in the sublunary kingdoms of imagination.

But Sunnyside, the home of the master artist, is real: a taxable entity. When in boyhood the future dean of American letters rowed along the shore of the Tappan Zee from the home of his kinsman Paulding, and finally rested on the grassy bank under the willows near the dwelling of his friend, Mr. Ferris, he resolved that some time he would return there to live. That spot, even in the callow days when he roamed the woods and shot squirrels with the future Secretary of the Navy, was his chosen home. Years afterward, in the maturity of his powers and his fame, he was drawn back by a strong though invisible

hand to the place where his heart was fixed.

From the recollections of one who knew Washington Irving personally, the pages following this minute have been taken. If the present writer may be pardoned for adding a personal note, he would refer to an ineffaceable though juvenile impression of a face that seemed all benignity, a hand placed in benediction upon a very unworthy tow-head, and the tones of a voice that had charmed a world of gentle and masterly men.

A little while after I saw Irving, the walls of the house that he loved held him no longer. The doors, opened for him for the last time, never admitted his living form again. But the territory that lies between the quaint old mansion with all its Dutch affectations of crow-step gables, weather-cock and tile, and its clustering memories of poet and prince, of emperor and savant, and the quiet resting place in the God's Acre beyond the old Dutch Church, is his own. Men may build where they please, and what they please, and a hundred title deeds cover the fields that lay between the infrequent houses when Sunnyside was erected; but the pilgrims from over the world still journey to breathe the atmosphere with which he enveloped the creatures of his fancy, and in spite of boundaries and title deeds, the master artist "holds in mortmain still his old estate."

Edgar Mayhew Bacon.



THE PEW WASHINGTON IRVING OCCUPIED FOR MANY YEARS



S the walls of Sunnyside were rising, so were those of Christ Church, and Irving's memory is interwoven with both.

"The ivy upon the Church Tower was planted by his hand, a cutting from the vine which now mantles, in rich luxuriance, the walls of Sunnyside.

"Within Christ Church there still remains his pew, cushioned as when he last occupied it, in which many pilgrims to this shrine of Irving's religious life, love for a moment to sit.

"Irving was elected Warden of Christ Church after his return from his mission as United States Minister to Spain. The office of Warden he held until his death.

"At a Vestry meeting he once remarked that he had now taken up the collection in Church for a very long time, and he ventured to ask if some one of his juniors in the Vestry would not relieve him of this duty.

"George D. Morgan sprang to his feet and said:—'Mr. Chairman, I protest against any such step on the part of Mr. Irving. It will create great confusion in the congregation; the service will be neglected, and the sermon unheeded. Now, when I bring my friends with me to Church, the first question I am asked is—Which is Mr. Irving? and all I have to say is—Mr. Irving is the gentleman who will bye and bye pass the plate in the north aisle.---But if he resigns this duty, I shall have to rise up in my pew and point him out to my friends (here suitng the action to the word) 'There he is, there he is.'

"There was no more devout or attentive hearer in the Church than he. With all his powers of

mind, he knew of no other spiritual sustenance than the Gospel of Christ; and its plain, simple truths, such as a little child might comprehend, were to him like the precious feeding upon the loaves broken in the Master's hand.

"To the citizens of New York, his native city, his name should be a household word, loved and revered; for there he wrote his first book, plucking the quaint and venerable traditions of New Amsterdam, and weaving them with imitable humor into Knickerbocker's veritable history of New York.

"And in Tarrytown on Hudson, where he built his unique cottage, Sunnyside, he has so animated the very hills and valleys around us, and has so peopled our neighborhood with the creations of his fancy, that we accept them as *real*, and point out to our friends the old red school house in Sleepy Hollow, where Ichabod Crane taught school, and say, 'Yonder is the bridge over which his prancing steed rushed when pursued by the headless horseman, who there bowled his fire-emitting head after the luckless lover, and in the morning a shattered pumpkin only was left as proof of the story.'

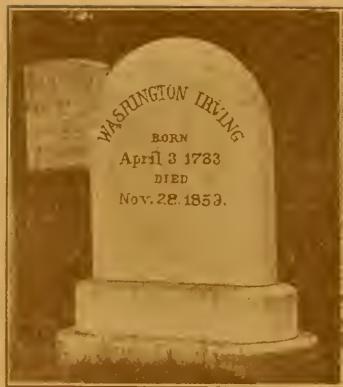
"Seldom has literary fame been so beautifully blended with personal attractiveness — seldom has learning and humor formed so close an alliance, as in Washington Irving.

"It is not only by the educated, but by those whom Lincoln calls 'the plain people,' that Irving's genius is recognized and his fame secured. What largely evokes this universal eulogy is the presence of the *man* in his work. In him the affections and the intellect were beautifully blended; the affections flowing in upon the intellect.

tempering it with their hallowed grace and charity, and the intellect in return giving strength and dignity to the affections, illustrating what Coleridge so aptly terms, 'The heart in the head.' "

Extracts from Rev. Dr. J. Selden Spencer's Personal Recollections of Washington Irving.







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